



STATE OF DELAWARE
OFFICE OF HIGHWAY SAFETY
P.O. BOX 1321
DOVER, DELAWARE 19903-1321
302-744-2743
www.ohs.delaware.gov

NEWS RELEASE

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NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT: Andrea Summers
Community Relations Officer
302-744-2743

**2007 National Traffic Fatalities Just Released –
Delaware has 4th Greatest Drop in Deaths**

DE safety officials also announcing new 91% statewide seat belt use rate

Dover – Delaware had the fourth greatest percentage decrease in overall traffic fatalities of any state in the nation in 2007, according to national figures just released today by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). Delaware's traffic deaths dropped by 20% last year, from 147 in 2006, to 118 in 2007. Only South Dakota (-24%) Vermont (-24%) and Wyoming (-23%) had greater percentage drops than the First State. Nationally, the number of people who died on the nation's roads dropped again last year, reaching historically low levels, U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary E. Peters announced. Secretary Peters said that in 2007, the overall number of traffic fatalities fell to 41,059, the lowest number since 1994.

Delaware Office of Highway Safety officials are ecstatic about the news. "Though we knew early on that our traffic deaths had decreased significantly, it's gratifying to learn that our state saw one of the largest percentage drop in fatalities nationwide," said Tricia Roberts, Director of the Office of Highway Safety. "We are constantly striving to implement the most effective strategies possible in an effort to prevent deaths and injuries on our roadways."

"The decrease in traffic deaths is a testimony to the dedication of the Office of Highway Safety staff and law enforcement statewide and the strong partnership they have forged," said Secretary of Safety and Homeland Security David B. Mitchell. "I am extremely proud of the work they do every day to protect the citizens of Delaware."

Yet OHS officials realize there is still much more work to be done. Last year, the state saw decreases in occupant (driver and passenger) deaths, bicycle deaths, and pedestrian deaths as

well as a decrease in those not wearing seat belts in fatal crashes. However there were increases in alcohol-related deaths, motorcycle deaths and aggressive driving related fatal crashes.

In 2008 though, there is much positive news to share. Today OHS officials are also announcing that Delaware's new official statewide seat belt use rate has climbed to an all time high of 91%! The seat belt use rate was determined by observational seat belt surveys conducted statewide after the conclusion of the 2008 *Click It or Ticket* campaign. Seat belt use has consistently increased from 67% in 2001 the year before *Click It or Ticket* began.

"We are thrilled with the increase in seat belt use because ultimately that translates into lives saved," said Roberts. "It is further evidence that the combination of high visibility enforcement and intense media awareness can affect a positive change in driver behavior."

Currently in 2008, overall traffic deaths are down slightly from this time last year (77 in 2007 to 73 in 2008). Alcohol-related deaths are also down from 44% at this time last year, to 34% of total fatalities currently. Areas of concern that OHS officials are concentrating on are aggressive driving related fatal crashes, particularly those involving speed, and pedestrian deaths which have increased, and motorcycle deaths which are down only slightly.

OHS is in the final weeks of its 120 Days of Summer HEAT initiative, which is a summer time crack down on Traffic Violators. The Summer HEAT initiative includes enforcement conducted as part of the *Click It or Ticket*, *Checkpoint Strikeforce* and *Stop Aggressive Driving* Campaigns. Since early May officers working under the initiative have made 138 DUI arrests, 74 drug arrests, issued 2,503 seat belt citations, 840 speeding citations, apprehended 82 wanted individuals, issued 22 underage drinking citations, made 53 felony and criminal arrests and recovered two stolen vehicles as well as 6 weapons.

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